Public Ownership of Democracy § A Brave New World?

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1.   To say that Democracy is at the crossroads today, is to strut out another time worn cliché. When has democracy ever not been at the crossroads? Yet, one stresses the point. If one looks around, not merely at our local communities, but across state and national borders as well, certain trends seem to be disturbingly burgeoning, in the name of democracy. Of these, three shifts stand out prominently.

- First, is the rising tide of majoritarianism. People who in their current circumstance unwittingly and blamelessly fall within a category of minorities, of colour, ethnic status, religion, region, caste or gender, have every reason to be worried. Cutting across most nations, leaders have come to power who ride on widespread public acceptance of their thesis that the majorities are in danger of being overrun by the minorities. They offer seemingly direct and effective solutions to this imagined problem; of building walls, of preparing registers and expelling people. They look the other way when decentralized violence becomes the norm, and react late, and desultorily. If and when there is public protest these leaders and their cohorts claim that they have the licence to do what they do, because they have won the majority vote, or at least, the largest of the minority vote.

- Second, is the way that institutions of democracy that were purpose built to keep a watch on each other, are being aligned in the direction of the same majoritarianism that propelled such leaders to power. Courts are being packed with pliant judges, the executive is kept under watch by an all too easily compromised investigating agency, and opposing political party leaders are blackmailed, put under surveillance and threatened.

- Third, there is a significant capitulation of the fourth estate, the media, which is supposed to be independent of all governmental institutions. With corporate ownership of the media, owners are increasingly poking their nose into editorial

policy, linked as they are with the powers that be. If there are any dissenters, then their voices are snuffed out, by threats, harassment and violence, if need be.

2.   Is this the beginning of a tectonic shift in the history of democracy? Will democracy survive, or at least survive in the form that we have seen it perform, if not flourish? Have the experiments of the Twentieth century and the first two decades of this one, in deepening democracy and improving the vigour of its practice, run their course? If so, what are the models that will replace them, and if indeed they are replaced, how can we be sure that they will succeed?

3.   There are many angles from which one can approach this discussion on the public ownership of democracy. One could be a study of the nuts and bolts of the process of democracy, a close look at the elections for instance, with a view to understanding its frailties and working towards solutions to mend them. The other could be a study of the other institutions that are critical to a democracy, even though in some systems, such institutions are not democratically elected. Thus, one could examine whether and how courts have functioned in protecting rights that are available to all citizens, particularly the right to speech, to life, to liberty and to not be discriminated against. A third way, which is where one confines oneself in this brief paper, is to focus upon the public ownership of democracy.

8.   The term -public ownership of democracy◦ is a nebulous one and a layperson may mistake this to mean the interest that the public shows in politics, and once every few years, in elections. Yet, democracy is an attitude that informs, or at least, ought to inform, every activity of a citizen in the public and sometimes, the private space as well. Once cannot be expected to have too much of an allegiance to democracy in the public space, if one is authoritarian in the private one. If one does not like free speech or the questioning of so called norms; if one shuts out discussion by saying that something is -tradition◦ and that cannot be questioned, then one◦s public commitment to democracy is dubious.

4.   Let us look at the most obvious manifestation of democracy § the conduct of elections and the participation of people in them. While elections are obviously a form of

selection of our representatives in the government, it is also a system of holding to account our previous representatives, who quite often run again for office. However, they are not a means by which we can hold our elected representatives accountable for their daily actions in office; we have to wait for their term to finish, before we can elected to remove them from office. For that reason, elections are known as a -blunt° instrument of accountability. When they come around, we may be swayed by something temporary, a sudden promise of future manna even though previous performance may have been abysmal, or even by a bribe, or succumb to intimidation, to vote for someone we may not like very much. The situation is indeed, grim and succinctly summarized thus;

"We can consider elections implemented by states, provinces and city municipalities as democracies within which we are reduced to being passive recipients of a monologue. Citizens are called in-between substantially long periods of time, during elections, to provide a basic input: essentially accept or reject players in the same system. This is the bandwidth of the legacy system that is our so-called modern democracies. Under these systems less than one percent of the population is able to vote on legislation or execute budgets while the rest are legally forced to outsource their full citizenship rights to a representing minority that eventually figures out how to perpetuate itself."[9]

६.   The simple -yes° or -no° question that we answer when we cast a vote, if often too inadequate a form of expression of preference to really mean anything much. It may have sufficed to meet the needs of democracy so far, but will it suffice for the future?

७.   To those who for the above reasons have lost their belief in representative democracy, direct democracy offers an instinctive solution. Why ask representatives what they want, when we cannot hold them responsible for the consequences of their actions, till the next round of elections? Why not ask the people directly what they want? Anarcho-communitarians[२] who are -*usually both anti-market and anti-centralized state*°,

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[9] The Socially Smart Contract; https://www.democracy.earth/#paper

[२] Bardhan, Pranab.Decentralization of Governance and Development., Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. १६, no. ४, Fall २००२, pp. १८५.२०५.

and -*energetically support assignment of control to local self-governing communities*°, typically support such moves of a complete decentralization to the people.

८.   Yet, there are many instances where direct democracy may not work in driving the common good. A traditional society that is burdened with ideas of inborn inequality may use their autonomy to deny to some the freedoms ensured in a constitution. Hardly a day passes in India when one does not hear of cases of kangaroo courts that hand out iniquitous edicts and punish in the most brutal forms those who have transgressed oppressive local community codes.

९.   Somewhere in between these two poles are those who support the idea of democratic institutional decentralization, where power is distributed to subnational entities, whether they be States in a federal context or a tiered structure of local governments, which are then expected to function autonomously within the ambit of their functional responsibilities and powers.

१०.   So in what direction will democracy go? Will we opt, in the hope that the further away from us the government is, the more egalitarian it is likely to be, for highly centralized governments ruled over by despots? Or will we all turn anarcho-communitarian, and prefer the assignment of most decision making power to the people directly? Or is there a half-way house, comprising of multiple levels of government, each peopled by elected representatives?

११.   While this question has social, political and financial dimensions, quite often the first two approaches tend to elbow out the last. From the economics perspective, the area of fiscal federalism has thrown up several proponents who have argued for decentralisation. Tiebout[3], observed that when different localities provide varying mixes of public services financed from the tax revenues that they collect from the local population, people will tend to -vote with their feet°, moving and settling in those localities where they perceive that they get the most appropriate mix of services for the taxes they pay. In reality Tiebout°s observations might not have been universally applicable § people

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[3] C. M. Tiebout, -A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures°, *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. ६४(५), १९५६.

were not as mobile as he presumed – strong values of kinship and belonging, poverty, lack of skills and confidence all acted as barriers to mobility. However, even if people had no option but to endure their local governments and negotiate a better deal from the taxes they paid, Oates[8] believed that decentralized systems were better as voters could exercise their preferences and influence local decisions better through the ballot. He propounded the decentralization theorem, in which he stated that *in the absence of cost savings from the centralized provision of local public good and of inter-jurisdictional externalities,* the level of welfare will always be at least as high and typically higher, if they are provided locally. Implicit in Oates◦ theorem was the possibility that (a) there could be scales of efficiency due to centralized provision and (b) that inter-jurisdictional externalities would call for centralized provision of services. Drawing from this point, since structures of government systems and the jurisdictions of governments would not precisely match with the footprints of goods and services, inter jurisdictional spillovers can be expected, consequent to which assignment of functions would primarily be defined as the –efficient management of spillover flows◦. Jack Weldon (१९६६) critiqued this approach by observing that if central governments could correctly calculate the exact size of the grants needed to internalize the spillovers, all functions should be assigned to it. He said that in case central governments could perform the difficult task of estimating all marginal spillover flows and design an appropriate grants programme, a division of functions was not only unnecessary but also wasteful; a chastening thought for pro-decentralisers!

१२.   To sum up, economists who contributed to the first generation theories of fiscal federalism (FGFF) approached decentralization from many aspects; considering it to be a vehicle for better political negotiation, to a means of more efficiently and responsively delivering services, to stating that it essentially is a means of managing spillover externalities of services whose footprints do not match the boundaries of political structures. However, in hindsight, all their views were based upon an inherent assumption; *that all the actors in the system were driven by the primary aim to work for the common public good* § or as put more elegantly by Barry Weingast (२००९) as –*benevolent maximisers of the social welfare◦* It was this central assumption that was questioned by the proponents of second generation fiscal federalism (SGFF) theories.

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[8] Oates, १९७२

93.   SGFF proponents examined real situations and attempted to derive theory by adapting FGFF prescriptions within real life political playgrounds. The development of SGFF was also spurred by the close study of how decentralization and empowerment of local governments in Latin-America had triggered macro-economic failure. Local governments there when empowered to raise resources prepared inflated plans, borrowed heavily and in the absence of any hard budget constraints at their levels, ran up huge expenditure liabilities that the State eventually had to underwrite. The first insight that emerged from a study of these failures was that contrary to the assumption inherent in FGFF, elected public officials did not necessarily act in furtherance of the common public good, but generally did with an eye on their future election prospects. Second, in the absence of controls to the contrary, every institution tended to make attempts to reduce its budget constraints, by exporting its tax burden. Sub-national and local governments faced with a soft budget constraint had a strong incentive to spend beyond their means, because they always veered to the expectation that they would be bailed out by the central government. What can be derived from the observations of SGFF proponents is that much stronger disincentives need to be incorporated into institutional design of decentralized governance systems to ensure that local governments function within their financial means and efficiently perform their responsibilities, without compromising on the essential reason for decentralization, which is greater responsiveness to local heterogeneity and greater voice for the people.

94.   The conclusions that emerge from empirical observations of how highly decentralized democracy functions, is that people can be as capricious and ill-informed locally, as they are when they elect despots to power. Most citizens do not want taxes to be raised, but will vote for better services. It stands to reason therefore, that politicians therefore promise better services and remain silent about tax increases to fund such services, hoping that they can find means by which they export their tax burden to other communities or to higher levels of government. Thus, while local democracy seems to be instinctively more responsive, they can lead to fiscal fragmentation which leaves little money for networked solutions and the ignoring of externalities by proposing NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) solutions to their chronic problems.

१५.   There have been many solutions that have been implemented to ensure that neither centralized, nor decentralized governments are let off the hook. Most such solutions focus on building better accountability structures that lay bare government actions to public scrutiny, and also introduce instruments by which people can question and audit their government's actions.

Social accountability (SAc) refers to forms of accountability that are typically organised by civil society. Smulotvitz and Peruzzoti (२०००) describes this means as *-a non-electoral, yet vertical mechanism of control that rests on the actions of a multiple array of citizens' associations and movements on the media; actions that aim at exposing governmental wrongdoing, bringing new issues into the public agenda, or activating the operation of horizontal agencies*[5]. Malena, Foster and Singh[6], terms Social Accountability as a way in which *-ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations ¤ participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. ¤.. These citizen-driven accountability measures complement and reinforce conventional mechanisms of accountability such as political checks and balances, accounting and auditing systems, administrative rules and legal procedures'*. It refers to Social Accountability as the *-broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens, communities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent media can use to hold public officials and servants accountable.'* However, the authors caution us by drawing attention to an important conceptual detail § *that the term -Social accountability' is a misnomer, as it is not a kind of accountability, but a means of extracting accountability.*

१६.   SAc mechanisms are an effective way of channelizing citizens' voice, to exert pressure on governments at all levels to deliver services to the former, or improve their quality, responsiveness, and accessibility. In order to be effective, such arrangements also have to provide for forums where the government can hear citizens, gain a better understanding of their concerns and tailor their services better to ensure inclusion of the

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[5] Peruzotti, E. and Smulovitz, C., (2000), 'Societal Accountability in Latin America', journal of Democracy 11(4): 147-158

[6] Malena, C, Forster, R. and Singh, J. २००८. Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice. Washington: The World Bank, Social Development Paper No. 76.

poorest and most marginalised[9]. Malena and Singh provide a working classification of the mechanisms of SAc processes (Box 9).

Box 9:

Social Accountability § salient features

Definition: Broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens, communities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent media can use to hold public officials and servants accountable.

Why SAc? As elections alone do not enable citizens to hold public actors accountable for specific decisions or behaviour (except to vote them out when elections are held).

Types of SAc:
- Traditional citizen or civil society–led actions
    - *public demonstrations*
    - *protests,*
    - *advocacy campaigns,*
    - *investigative journalism,*
    - *public interest lawsuits*

- Emerging new generation approaches
    - *participatory data collection and analysis*
    - *Participatory public policy–making*
    - *participatory budgeting*
    - *public expenditure tracking*
    - *citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery*

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[9] Adapted from Report prepared for DFID – Assessing the Impact of Recognition of a Right to Sanitation on Improving Levels of Access and Quality of Services; Mary Ann Brocklesby, Rebecca Scott and Sheena Crawford, September २०११

SAc strategy design guided by:

- nature and purpose of the social accountability initiative;
- whether compliance is forthcoming;
- the expertise and means of those seeking accountability;
- availability of formal means of enforcement.

SAc classification based upon:

- stage of the public policy/budget cycle at which they are applied.
- whether they are initiated by citizens or the state;
- the extent to which they are institutionalized, or are independent;
- the extent to which they are collaborative or conflictive;
- whether they employ formal or informal sanctions; and
- whether they occur at the local, regional or national level.

Enforceability of SAc strategies:

- Informal mechanisms of reward or sanction:
  - *creating public pressure, for example, through (positive or negative) press releases, media coverage,*
  - *public displays of support or protest,*
  - *meetings between citizens and public officials, petitions, etc.*

- Appeal to formal means of sanction or enforcement to effect change,
  - *presenting evidence to a corruption control agency,*
  - *appealing to a public ombudsman or*
  - *filing legal claim through the court system.*

- When such means are absent, lobby for reform and strengthening of such institutions in their absence.

- Leading to new hybrid of partially formalized mechanisms of enforcement

97.   In order to be effective, such arrangements also have to provide for forums where the government can hear citizens, gain a better understanding of their concerns and tailor

their services better to ensure inclusion of the poorest and most marginalised[6]. However, the contexts in which social accountability approaches are strategized, designed and implemented can vary widely. Some factors that critically impact the design of social accountability approaches relate directly to the communities concerned – their numbers, location, sense of community, isolation, internal social hierarchies, gender relations, political history and vigour of democratic practice. Ideally, social mobilization is best driven by civil society, which stands at arms° length from the government and in particular, does not draw any funding from it. This will ensure that there is a separation between the activities of raising voice on the one hand and service provision and supply on the other. Yet, one rarely comes across these ideal circumstances in the real world. Box २ summarises the key challenges that can blunt a social accountability strategy and the likely approaches to overcome them.

Box २

Challenges	Possible solutions
Historical legacy of conflict, poverty, lack of democracy and discrimination: The most difficult circumstances in which SAc approaches are designed and implemented are when countries are emerging from prolonged conflict. The situation is exacerbated if the societies concerned have a history of discriminatory socially sanctioned practices, which have resulted in certain sections of the community being socially excluded or whose opportunities are restricted, based on class, caste, religious, ethnic and/or gender distinctions	Government to be the catalyst: The impetus for SAc measures will need to be provided by the government, in spite of the possibility that as it is also the progenitor of service delivery and democratic governance, there would be a tendency to limit the extent to which such accountability practices are allowed to flower.

[6] Adapted from Report prepared for DFID – Assessing the Impact of Recognition of a Right to Sanitation on Improving Levels of Access and Quality of Services; Mary Ann Brocklesby, Rebecca Scott and Sheena Crawford, September २०११

Diverse objectives of SAc: There might be different objectives harboured within the overall approach. While no one will argue with a SAc strategy that aims to remove poverty, bureaucrats, politicians, civil society and development partners, might have differing immediate priorities. While at one level, a SAc strategy might strive to dispel the memory of people having been wronged, to erase social inequality and to give people an identity, the immediate goal might be the less lofty, but no less important one of delivery of services.	**Harmonisation of objectives:** The trick is to ensure that even though stakeholders might have differing priorities, they still engage in implementing a coordinated SAc strategy. A more dangerous possibility is that of actors harbouring agendas inimical to the end goals of empowerment. SAc, if successful, can change power structures radically and there might be many who only mouth the rhetoric of social change without really desiring that it should happen. In such circumstances, special care should be taken to ensure that covert agendas do not weaken or blunt SAc efforts.
Hard work, coordinated effort, Implementing a robust SAc plan is a costly and time consuming process, extraordinarily dependent upon the vigorous activity and high morale of a large number of stakeholders. Properly oriented staff within the government and NGO sector need to work in concert to ensure that SAc goals are achieved. That in turn requires coordinated and cooperative activity of sensitive trainers and managers upstream.	**Streamlined fund flows, timely interventions:** Providing sufficient funds steadily to ensure sensitive and timely training, organization and execution of social mobilization strategies and fund the demands catalyzed through social mobilization pose challenges. Good SAc strategies can fail due to insufficient funding or the inability of governments to respond effectively to demands for accountability catalyzed through social mobilisation.
Slow results: Those implementing SAc strategies can become dispirited because results often take time to manifest. They are also under pressure to perform from impatient strategists and donor organizations,	**Investing in Champions?** Ensuring that the goals of SAc strategies are achieved in such circumstances often depends upon champions amongst the bureaucracy and political executive, deeply committed to these. Successful SAc

anxious to see tangible results.	strategies where there have both been widespread grassroots activity and sympathetic and effective government response have invariably been possible due to the leadership provided by empathetic and dynamic ministers and bureaucrats.
Tensions building up and spilling over: Citizen-government engagement can initially become combative as citizens° voice becomes more strident and government institutions take time to be responsive. Tensions can spill over, not only between bureaucrats and people, but between people and political leaders and representatives as well, as the latter°s authority is also challenged.	

१८.   If these challenges are negotiated through without communication between stakeholders breaking down, it can result in harmonious Citizen-Service engagements that involve citizens in decision-making and management of services, which in turn drives service improvement. The benefits include[४] an increased willingness of all actors to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities, increased autonomy and ownership in services and greater understanding of development processes, changes in the relations of power between citizens and service delivery agents, increased inclusion and involvement of poor and marginalised people and the enabling and sustaining of environments which support scale-up of successful models.

१९.   The one weakness of social accountability practices is that they could be distorted, if the instruments of scrutiny are captured by the very forces who do not want their actions to be scrutinized. Democracies the world over now report severe action against whistleblowers, of community leaders being paid off to look the other way during public hearings of projects with adverse environmental implications, and such like. The important thing is then, to improve the quality of deliberation in fora that are purpose built for conducting social audits, or sit in judgment over key decisions that affect accountability.

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[४] Adapted from Crawford २००७.

२०. One way out of this conundrum of social accountability resulting in a severe pushback from the government, is to invest in a more deliberative democracy[१०]. Professor John Gastil defines different forms of public discourse, whilst leading up to a precise definition of what deliberation is all about. A public discussion is an unstructured exchange of ideas and opinions on an issue with no specific purpose and a public dialogue an open-ended exploration of different perspectives and experiences to reach mutual understanding. However, a public deliberation is a rigorous and respectful examination of a problem to reach a shared judgment or decision he says. The process of public deliberation may be driven by a genuine desire to facilitate the depth of conversation, but it might also be often, a way to distance oneself from finding solutions to wicked problems. Politicians may like to push for public deliberation so as to distance themselves from responsibility on controversies, reduce pressure from marginalized groups and also get credit for achieving public consensus and promoting fair and open public processes. Yet, ensuring that the quality of deliberation is maintained, many prior actions have to precede the actual deliberative process. Information bases have to be solidified, key values prioritized and even possibly in stealth, a broad range of solutions may need to be thought of, with plenty of material on the pros, cons and tradeoffs that go hand in hand with certain decisions. Then, during the social process of deliberation, care has to be taken to distribute speaking opportunities, ensure that nobody is misunderstood, that there is patience when diverse perspectives are being shared, which in turn, calls for respecting other participants.

२१. Yet, one of the problems with deliberative democratic practices is that it is very difficult to ensure well structures design of deliberation that ought to generate a high quality discussion, when the numbers of people involved increases. The smaller the group, the greater the possibility for high quality discussions, but the lesser is the political legitimacy. At the same time, deliberative processes are well-nigh impossible in crowds, even though large numbers of people can generate high political impact.

२२. Twentieth century town hall meetings have shown some interesting results, of how deliberation can be catalyzed even in large groups. Following Hurricane Katrina, large

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[१०] I am deeply grateful to John Gastil, Professor and Head, the Department of Communication Arts & Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania (USA), for these ideas that I have adapted to the Indian context.

numbers of people numbering in their thousands, which included both New Orleans residents and former residents displaced into other cities were engaged in an intensive day-long deliberation held at small tables connected wirelessly to produce summary results that were displayed in real time, to everybody engaged in the deliberation. The intimacy of small round tables encouraged even those who were shy and retiring to participate, as also those who were not confident of sharing out of the box ideas to a larger group, lest they be considered naïve or worse, mocked. A "theme team" that comprised of individual volunteers at tables helped organize open-ended comments from tables and displayed them on public boards visible to all. The chances were thus ripe for out of the box ideas to go -viral◦ as those who thought along the same lines gained confidence from the fact that they were not isolated in their thinking, and others at other tables were also mooting similar ideas.

२३.   Another example is that of the Oregon Citizens◦ Initiative Review (CIR), where a random sample of २४ Oregon voters were chosen to serve as Citizen Panelists, who heard over a week, pro and con advocates and neutral witnesses on a particular issue that was slated to go before all voters in a public referendum. This random sample of jury members then put out their opinion as an advisory that went along with the voting sheet on that referendum, thus giving voters the gist of the arguments for and against the issue that was under consideration and also giving their opinion § that of a random group of people with whom the voter could identify.

२४.   Yet, there are obstacles in the path to organizing deliberative democratic practices. There is plenty of bad news about how people think and listen. Deliberation requires seeking new information, it takes more effort to process information, requires rethinking preexisting views and risks reaching unpopular conclusions. Sloganeering can ruin deliberation, because it attempts to capture positions in a single word or brusque sentence. Simplistic postures are easy to understand, the appeal to the emotions and to the desire for simple solutions. Those who adopt such shortcuts to deliberation are easily tempted to make the opposition sound evil and/or ignorant and prevents the inconvenience of getting to know their opponents as people. If polarized aggression takes over a deliberative process as it easily can, it may make the challenge of including under-represented groups insurmountable. Minority voices may choose to remain silent,

as they lose faith in the deliberative process. Thus, deliberation requires the need for professional facilitation with the patience of Job, and clear ground-rules that enable everybody to speak without fear.

২৫.   Even as direct democracy and representative democracy are both in ferment, there are some new ideas that are emerging on the horizon, fueled by the possibilities that technology can offer. Liquid democracy[৯৯] is one such idea that can, if we wish, quickly re-engineer the way that we deliberate and participate in a democracy. The fact of the matter is that most people do not have the time to participate in direct democracy, and at the same time, their faith in representative democracy is declining as they see venal politicians of all hues renege upon their promises and engage in acts only of self-interest. Every citizen has the right to provide feedback and vote on issues of policy and process. Yet, they may lack the sufficient experience to decide upon an issue. The answer today we have for that problem is that one can contact one°s public representative and expect that individual to reflect the opinion of the people. However, it is well-nigh impossible to expect, even from the most conscientious public representative, the ability to track every single issue and gain instant expertise to make a quality contribution to policy making. It is here that the idea of liquid democracy kicks in. it is similar to a -pay as you go° system, where one chooses one°s representative for the issue in question. In a liquid democracy, one would be able to choose a personal representative to be a proxy for one, on any particular issue. The proxy representative may in turn choose yet another proxy to represent that issue and if this process is carried on, one might have a publicly verified network of proxies that are connected through blockchain, enabling every voter to keep track of their proxies and ensuring constant accountability during decision making. A networked system of proxies would include professional politicians as well; which means that the wide chasm that exists between voters and their representatives is narrowed down, if not closed.

২৬.   The Democracy Earth Foundation explains this approach rather well;
"*Blockchains enable trustless systems by eroding the need of human authority and increasing the defenses of vote integrity with a shared resource that has scorekeeping as*

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[৯৯] The Socially Smart Contract; https://www.democracy.earth/#paper

its main function. This permits unprecedented designs for electoral systems. With a blockchain-based democracy votes become censorship resistant and every single voter can audit an election without requiring any kind of access rights to infrastructure. By storing vote data in a blockchain rather than in private servers or ballot boxes, audit costs become abstracted and are turned into a guaranteed right for every participant. Voters are not just mere spectators but also sovereign gatekeepers of the whole process. This kind of transparency cannot be delivered by traditional electoral systems, analog or electronic.

The widespread adoption of blockchains is giving rise to a model that initially grew under the shadows of established institutions but eventually will render them obsolete. Blockchains are automated bureaucracies that offer significant financial benefits in terms of transaction costs while abstracting the need of intermediaries."

২৭.   In conclusion, the dissatisfaction with the current waning of the public ownership of democracy ought not to be a cause for disquiet; on the other hand, it provides the substrate for optimism. Contentment with how democracy functions could often conceal its total subjugation to powerful interests, which create the false impression that everything is right with democracy. The future will however call for rapid changes in the processes and techniques that can enhance and hold the interest of people in democracy. Blockchain and artificial intelligence, the emergence of social networking systems that transcend national boundaries, could enable a much faster and smoother breakdown of current protocols for the exercise of democracy. Whatever else, the future looks exciting.